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Executive Summary

This is to nominate Department of Transportation District Director, District 6 - Central Region, J. Mike Leonardo, for Outstanding Achievement in leading the way in supporting innovation for the small business program. Mr. Leonardo maintains a prominent focus on the small business outreach program applying consistent executive level support. He has created an environment that fosters new ideas while enthusiastically supporting the implementation of the ideas. Outreach efforts were focused on reaching minority-owned small businesses in the Central Valley, the implementation of a small business website, and establishing on-going partnerships with Local, Federal and State Agencies have all been instrumental to the success of the small business program. The Caltrans District 6 Small Business Outreach program is one of the first state agencies to partner with another state agency, the Department of Corrections, joining forces to maximize resources. The partnership, created in September, 2002, was established to expand community outreach to outlying areas, provide opportunities to share ideas and represent our respective state agencies in local community workshops. The definition of "Best Practice" benchmark is a response, practice or function that, by peer consensus, has been designated as the "BEST" throughout the state. The Sustained Superior Accomplishment, Superior Gold and Superior Silver awards were given to two employees of the District 6 Small Business Outreach program in November 2002. This award is given to employees within the Department of Transportation for superior job performance, resulting in exceptional contribution to improving state government. The award recognized achievements in developing a successful small business outreach program.

One objective of the District 6 2002/03 small business action plan was to extend outreach efforts to minority-owned small businesses. On September 4, 2002, the small business outreach program was a guest on Radio Unica, a local Spanish radio station. The business talk show enabled us to communicate to Spanish-speaking small business owners about the opportunities of doing business with Caltrans. On February 7, 2003, in partnership with Department of Corrections, debuted on the Fresno Hmong Community Radio Station. Joe Medina, Central California Women's Facility Small Business and DVBE Advocate and Steve Diaz, Caltrans District 6 Small Business Outreach program, discussed the opportunities of doing business with both Caltrans and the Department of Corrections on the hour long show. The Small Business Outreach office translated and printed the "The Caltrans Selling Goods and Services" pamphlet into Spanish. Initially, fifty copies of the pamphlet have been printed. The pamphlets are available for the monthly workshop at the SBA office in Fresno.

Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) Counselor, Aurelio Roy Salas, of Visalia, stated that 90% of his clientele are non-English speaking. The pamphlet was very popular at the Tulare Visalia Hispanic Business Expo this year. The pamphlet is a good tool to help get the word out about business opportunities with Caltrans.

The Caltrans District 6 Information Technology unit, launched the small business website: www.dot.ca.gov/dist6/sb.htm. The project included identifying information that would be useful for the small business owner. Research involved the Best Practices process of viewing the websites from the Department of Transportation and other state agencies. Early on, it was evident that not all of the information regarding contracting with the State of California was available in one single location. The website was designed to remove the barriers in doing business with the state government, on the Internet. Information was gathered from business owners that attended government contracting workshops, business expos and from other local government agencies. The website is continually monitored for current information, broken links and ease of navigation. Best Practices is an on going process by viewing other small business websites for comparison. With the click of a mouse, the user can view information on Contracting with Caltrans made simple, locate current contracts out for bid, or find a prime contractor of an on going contract. There are links to the California Contractor Registry, the Department of General Services Small Business Certification Resources and the Caltrans Office of Engineer to name a few. Just recently, a link was added to Caltrans local offices by County, a map that identified the 12 districts and includes a brief description of that district. This will enable the business owner to find the location of a potential contract. For example: the public is usually not aware that District 3 is in the Sacramento area. The website uses the Department of Transportation version of the template developed by the Governor's Office that is mandatory for all external state agency webpages.

The District 6 Small Business Outreach program established and maintains an ongoing partnerships with the local Small Business Administration(SBA), City of Fresno, Greater Fresno Area Chamber of Commerce, the Small Business Development Center(SBDC) The Central Valley Business Incubator (CVBI) and the Procurement Technical Assistance Center(PTAC). "Government Agreements Made Simple" workshops for local businesses. A new partner to the team is Joe Medina, Small Business/DVBE Advocate for Central California Women's Facility. The goal of the workshop is to provide the business owner with the information and resources that will begin to remove the barriers of having the government as a customer. The morning session includes presentations on federal and state procurement processes and programs available for small businesses. The afternoon session is a hands-on computer session. The business owner completes on-line registration for both the federal and state procurement programs. The presenters assist the business owners with completing the Central Contractor Registration (CCR), registering on the SBA PRO-NET database, the Department of General Services (DGS) Subscription Outreach Service (SOS) database and the Caltrans Interest Registry database. In addition, the participants complete the DGS small business application. The presenters are on hand throughout the day to provide assistance and answer questions.

The District 6 Small Business Outreach program partnered with the PTAC center of Merced, California. Jane McGinnis, PTAC Director, conducts a monthly workshop titled "Introduction to Government Contracting" sponsored by the SBA. The workshop is for small business owners from located throughout the Central Valley. Due to the partnership, the workshop now includes a one-hour presentation on contracting with Caltrans and doing business with the State of California and the small business certification program conducted by the District 6 Small Business staff. This is an avenue for communicating the State Small Business program to businesses looking to have the state as a customer.

With the support of the District Director, J. Mike Leonardo's and his outstanding leadership, improvements in the small business utilization goals were right around the corner. In July of 2001, District 6 small business utilization percentage was 9% and for the FY 01/02 the small business percentage was \$3,366,086.96 or 34.7%. The latest report (January 2003 through March 2003) has District 6 at 48.9% of total expenditures awarded to certified small business firms.

Lessons Learned:

Have an Action Plan that is flexible to the changing environment. The impact of the state budget hampered our ability to attend the Business Expo's/Conferences and reduced our ability to travel. We searched for business events that were free and still enabled us to reach our target audience. The monthly Introduction to Government Contracting workshop is one such event.

Presentations should be freshened up periodically to prevent complacency for the presenter. Review presentation materials for outdated information. Find new ways to share information about the small business program. Include success stories of local firms getting state contracts.

You must keep the attention of employees with purchasing responsibilities, keep their eyes on the small business goals. A monthly email to District 6 credit card holders titled, "Small Business News" is one way of accomplishing this. The message includes status of District 6 Division CAL/Card users and their % of small business activity for the previous month. In addition, updates on policies and procedures affecting the small business program and recognition for outstanding achievements and upcoming activities are included in the email.